

Amendments to the Specification:

At page 1, before line 3, insert "Field of the Invention".

At page 1, before line 7, insert "Background of the Invention".

At page 3, line 34, delete "the Applicant Company has" and insert therefore "Applicants have".

At page 4, before line 32, insert "Detailed Description of the Invention".

At page 4, line 32, delete "Applicant Company" and insert therefore "Applicants have".

After page 13, insert the following abstract as a new page.

Abstract

The invention concerns a continuous method for preparing ethyl lactate by esterifying lactic acid with ethanol, in the presence of a catalyst which comprises reacting said lactic acid with ethanol in an initial ethanol/lactic acid mol ratio not less than 2.5, in the presence of a catalyst, at a reflux of the reaction medium of about 100°C under absolute pressure ranging between 1.5 to 3 bars. Said method is characterized in that it comprises continuously extracting from the esterification reaction medium a near-azeotropic water/ethanol gas mixture; then dehydrating said gas mixture directly using molecular sieves, then recuperating from said dehydration an ethanol gas stream capable of being recycled to the esterification reaction medium and a flow consisting of water and ethanol which is subjected to distillation wherefrom is obtained water and an azeotropic water/ethanol mixture which is injected into the distillation column head of the gas mixture extracted from the esterification reaction medium; then in continuously extracting crude ethyl lactate which is subjected to purification wherefrom are obtained high purity ethyl lactate and heavy products."